



**Monthly Drought Update  
November 17, 2015  
San Luis Obispo County**

Note: Information provided in this update varies by date.

**CURRENT CONDITIONS**

**U.S. Drought Monitor Status:**

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor report released November 5, 2015, indicates San Luis Obispo County remains at the **D4 – Exceptional Drought intensity rating**. Approximately 92% of the state remains at a level D2 – Severe Drought or worse with 45% of the state in a D4 – Exceptional Drought intensity rating.

**San Luis Obispo County Precipitation Totals (in inches):**

Sub-Region	Area / Rain Station	Average Annual Rainfall	2015-16 Water Year (July 2015-June 2016)	
			Cumulative Total	% of Total Average
North Coast	Cambria (ALERT #717)	22.0	1.97	9%
	Whale Rock Reservoir (County Site #166.1)	16.0	1.75	11%
Inland	Paso Robles (County Site #10.0)	14.1	3.36	24%
	NE Atascadero (ALERT #711)	17.0	1.42	8%
	Atascadero MWC (County Site #34.0)	17.5	1.50	9%
	Santa Margarita (ALERT #723)	24.0	1.49	6%
	Salinas Dam (County Site #94)	20.9	1.68	8%
South Coast	SLO Reservoir (ALERT #749)	24.0	1.89	8%
	Lopez Recreation Area (ALERT #707)	23.0	2.01	9%
	West of Nipomo (CIMIS #202)	14.8	1.40	9%
	Nipomo East (ALERT #728)	18.0	1.10	6%

Note: This table contains provisional data from automated gauges and has not been verified. All units reported in inches. Report generated at 11:00am on 11/3/2015.

**Near-term Outlook for Precipitation:**

An El Niño (ENSO) Advisory continues in effect, with the November 2, 2015 ENSO Diagnostic Discussion indicating a 95 percent chance of strong even through winter with gradual weakening into spring 2016.

Forecasts are beginning to consistently predict higher chances of a stronger event, which could lead to an increase in precipitation in California this winter. The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook is calling for the drought to persist or intensify throughout northern California and remain but improve throughout southern California and on the Central Coast if El Niño delivers rain as predicted.

**Reservoir Levels (% of capacity):**

Reservoir	% of Capacity	Current Acre Feet Storage
Nacimiento	19%	71,903
Whale Rock	37%	14,349
Lopez	30%	14,839
Salinas	13%	3,065

Source: [www.slocountywater.org](http://www.slocountywater.org) County of San Luis Obispo

**STATE WATER**

**Status:** The Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced expected water deliveries in 2015 to most customers of the State Water Project (SWP) to 20% of their requested amounts. San Luis Reservoir is currently at 17% capacity (32% of historical average).

**VULNERABLE WATER SYSTEMS****County Service Areas (CSA's):****Santa Margarita (CSA 23)**

- Drought response level remains at ALERT status.
- Primary pumping is from shallow well No. 4; water is also being pumped from deep well No. 3 to reduce needs from well No. 4. State officials have also authorized the use of shallow wells 1 & 2 should the need arise. CSA 23 wells have been used to supply firefighting efforts (along with water both the Nacimiento and Salinas Water systems). Staff continues to monitor well levels and advance the emergency connection to Atascadero.
- An emergency ordinance was adopted limiting outdoor watering. An informational mailer was sent to customers and signs in the community have been installed.
- Staff is monitoring conditions for a potential status change to CRITICAL.
- The intertie with Atascadero Mutual Water Company (AMWC) is under construction with an anticipated finish date in November.

**Shandon (CSA 16)**

- Two wells currently provide all water to the Shandon community and continued to be monitored.
- Connection to the State Water Project is out to bid.
- An emergency ordinance was adopted limiting outdoor watering. An informational mailer was sent to customers and signs in the community have been installed.

**Cayucos (CSA 10A)**

- Supply is available from Whale Rock and one on-site well. Staff has given a presentation to the Advisory Committee and business groups regarding conserving this supply.
- An emergency ordinance was adopted limiting outdoor watering. An informational mailer was sent to customers and signs in the community have been installed.

**Avila Valley (CSA 12)**

- Adequate supply is available from Lopez and State water "carryover" water sources for this year and next.

**Chorro Valley Institutions (CMC, Animal Services, Sheriff, County Operations, Camp San Luis, Cuesta College, County Office of Education):**

- 2015 State water carryover water is available and being provided.
- The existing distribution system is being evaluated to assure water losses are minimized.
- CMC has completed their water treatment plant upgrade project.
- Discussions with City of San Luis Obispo to exchange Nacimiento for Whale Rock are being initiated if State Water is insufficient in 2016.

**Non-County Operated:**

- **Cambria Community Services District**

Status: Emergency San Simeon Creek Brackish Water Supply Project went online on January 20, 2015. The district is now seeking a permit to operate it permanently.

- **San Simeon Community Services District**

Status: The CSD has a new well head salinity project to increase supplies in the current prop 84 grant round. DWR released draft funding recommendations and the San Luis Obispo IRWM region is recommended for 75% of grant request.

- **Heritage Ranch Community Services District**

Status: The Nacimiento River is the only available water source for the community of Heritage Ranch. An emergency inter-tie will be funded with emergency grant funds and construction on the inter-tie is underway.

- **Rural Paso Robles residents**

Status: Continuing to identify water-trucking options and examine outreach efforts. See County Drought Conditions and Water Conservation Website for drought relief update information.

## IMPACTS

### **Agricultural Impacts:**

Conditions within the agriculture industry fundamentally remain unchanged. Effects of continued drought on various commodities will not be fully understood until harvest is completed. Many producers are concerned with potential impacts from either a continuation of the drought or conversely, above average rainfall. Efforts to capture and store precipitation as well as to protect soils from potential erosion are being encouraged by University of California Farm Advisors as well as local Resource Conservation Districts.

### Agricultural Assistance - Update from the USDA Farm Service Agency

According to staff at the USDA Farm Service Agency, the following programs are active in providing assistance. The programs are briefly summarized as follows:

*LFP – Livestock Forage Disaster Program:* provides payments for grazing losses. Because San Luis Obispo County continues in the D4 drought category, current eligibility is for 5 months of payments. Deadline to file is January 30, 2016 for 2015 payments.

*ELAP – Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program:* provides relief to producers who haul water to livestock. If producers are hauling water as of October 1, 2015, they should call into their local office.

*EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program (NRCS):* provides funds for land conservation planning and implementation of conservation practices. This program provides cost-share funding through USDA – NRCS. Applications and approvals are ongoing.

*NAP – Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program:* provides cash payments to producers of noninsurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or planting did not occur due to natural disasters. Producers who are insured through this program should file a notice of loss as soon as possible and are required to file within 15 days of the loss being apparent to be eligible for benefits.

*Tree Assistance Program* – covering Red Blotch Disease in vineyards and losses due to drought conditions if growers rehabilitate or replant orchards.

For information about the assistance programs, contact the USDA Farm Service Agency:

Templeton: (805) 434-0398 Ext 2.

Santa Maria: (805) 928-9269

### **Fire Danger:**

#### Fire Danger

In 2015, CAL FIRE and the US Forest Service have responded to over 7,835 fires across the state, burning 824,290 acres.

Locally, CAL FIRE is fully staffed, including 12 wildland engines, and 24/7 staffing of hand crews and dozers. Paso Robles Air Attack Base is staffed with three tankers and one air attack. Defensible Space Inspectors (DSI) have conducted over 10,000 inspections countywide including over 4,000 focused inspections in Cambria involving handing out fire prevention education materials door-to-door to all residences. A portable RAWS (CAL FIRE 511) was deployed in Cambria to augment fire weather monitoring capabilities on the north coast.

The annual backyard burn season ended on April 13. A County-wide burn ban was proclaimed on June 19. This eliminates all burning within CAL FIRE jurisdiction except for campfires at approved campgrounds. A minimum of 2 inches of precipitation will be needed in order to consider lifting the burn ban. Large fire potential remains above normal in San Luis Obispo County.

#### Live Fuel Moisture (LFM)

*(LFM is the moisture content of live vegetation expressed as a percentage of the oven-dry weight.)*

LFM values in the County peaked much earlier than usual in 2015 and are continuing to trend downward with values below historic lows and approaching the critical level of 60. The Ventura County Fire LFM Table indicates an average LFM value of 54% which is a 6% decrease from the previous value and 10% below the historic average 64%. The Los Padres Intelligence fuel moisture table indicates a forest-wide LFM value of 60%, which is the critical level, down 1% from mid-October.

#### Dead Fuel Moisture

*(The moisture content of dead organic fuels is another important component of the relative fire danger. As with LFM above, dead fuel moisture levels are a good indicator of how likely fuels are to ignite and how intensely they will burn. 100-hr fuel refers to vegetation between 1 and 3 inches in diameter and 1000-hr fuel is 3-6 inches. When the fuel moisture content is low, fires start easily and will spread rapidly.)*

Many fuel beds in the County, particularly coastal sage scrub, have seen a dramatic increase in the percentage of dead fuel. In many areas, the volume of dead vegetation exceeds the volume of live vegetation. The current values are indicated as below average for both, however, the values are expected to rapidly increase for a few days as a result of the recent rainfall.

#### Temperatures/Relative Humidity (RH)

*(When combined with other factors influencing the fire environment such as wind, steep topography, and low fuel moisture levels, hot temperatures and low RH can significantly increase the fire danger by increasing fire initiation, spread rates, burning intensity, and difficulty of control.)*

Longer days and warm and dry weather has steadily increased the fire danger, which remains high despite this week's storm.

#### Energy Release Component (ERC)

*(ERC is an index related to how hot a fire could burn. It is directly related to the 24-hour, potential worst case, total available energy (BTUs) at the head of a fire. The ERC can serve as a good characterization of fire season as it tracks seasonal fire danger trends well. ERC has low variability, and is the best fire danger component for indicating the effects of intermediate to long-term drying on fire behavior.)*

Cooler, shorter days have resulted in slight decreases in ERC values that are above average. ERC values will drop for a few days as a result of this week's storm. These values are likely to steadily increase over the next week, however, as fuels will rapidly dry out with no rain in the forecast.

#### Forest and Range Impacts

Widespread tree mortality is plainly evident throughout the County. All tree species have been adversely affected by the drought. Thousands of coast live oaks of all sizes in all areas and at all elevations have died. The area most severely impacted is the Cambria Monterey Pine Forest (CMPF). Already one of the most endangered native forests in the world, the CMPF has been further devastated by the drought. In addition to the major impacts to forest health, the resulting fire hazard has increased to the point where catastrophic stand-replacing fire is very likely. Hundreds of large dead hazard trees are poised to fall on homes, vehicles, and vital infrastructure. Solutions are available including dead tree removal, biomass removal, cogeneration, thinning, prescribed burning, tree planting, and invasive weed control. Implementing worthwhile solutions is extraordinarily challenging and requires a community based effort involving multi-agency cooperation. These cumulative impacts have created the current situation where approximately 40-50% of the overstory trees are dead or dying. In certain areas, mortality exceeds 90%. In addition to the major impacts to forest health, the resulting fire hazard has increased to the point where catastrophic stand-replacing fire is very likely.

Grants:

The SLO Fire Safe Council (FSC) completed work on a grant awarded by PG&E to assist with hazard tree abatement work in Cambria. The work included the felling of over 400 hazard trees and the chipping of several hundred tons of slash. The FSC was also awarded a \$498,000 grant from the CAL FIRE Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to help improve forest health in Cambria. Another \$300,000 grant has been selected as the number one proposal from the State of California through the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC WUI grants). The focus of this WFLC WUI grant will be to augment and improve fuelbreaks on the east side of Cambria.

Emergency Permits

The County is continuing to work to provide relief from hazard tree permitting requirements in Cambria to facilitate tree removal on the high number of affected parcels. The County Planning and Building Department approved an emergency hazard tree removal permit allowing Cambria residents to remove dead hazardous trees with a non-cost permit. The County Planning Director sent a letter to residents authorizing them to remove hazard trees under certain conditions which include contacting the Fire Department and having an inspection done and their trees marked by CAL FIRE. The Cambria Community Services District was also issued an Emergency Permit for removal of up to 300 dead trees on District property.

Forest Assessments

Forest assessments under the direction of Cal Poly forestry faculty have been initiated to quantify the extent of this issue and the results will be made known as soon as they become available. This research work will continue and will provide the foundation for all the work that will occur under the grants described above.

**Economic:**

In an effort to coordinate local and state response to drought impacts the following surveys are being utilized by the County:

Drought Business Impact Survey

The Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) and the Employment Development Department (EDD) developed a streamlined survey to report drought-related job impacts. Collecting "real-time" drought-related information is essential for the LWDA and the Governor's Drought Relief Task Force to identify the drought's impact on California's industries, employers, and workers. The survey, which collects information on drought impacts for employers allows the affected employer to report directly to the State, thereby, providing a level of confidentiality that business and industry need. A link to the new survey is available on the San Luis Obispo Workforce Development Board's website: [www.SLOworkforce.com](http://www.SLOworkforce.com).

Though the WIB is hearing that there are impacts, the county does not have any "reportable" impacts due to the State's requirements for reporting (i.e. specific business name, address, etc.).

Domestic Water Issues-Intake Form

The Governor's Drought Task Force created an online intake form for local, state, or tribal and federal agencies to document domestic water issues. The information is intended to inform and coordinate state response and mitigate drought impacts. Both agencies and individuals can complete the reporting form. Individuals with domestic water issues are encouraged to contact County Environmental Health at (805) 781-5544 or visit the state online reporting website at <https://mydrywatersupply.water.ca.gov/report/>.

## STATE & FEDERAL KEY ACTION ITEMS FROM LAST MONTH

### **Proclamation of a State Emergency – Dead and Dying Trees**

On October 30, 2015, Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. proclaimed a state of emergency to protect communities against unprecedented tree die-off. The United States Forest Service recently estimated that more than 22 million trees have already died in California due to current conditions. The proclamation helps identify high hazard zones for wildfire and falling trees that have resulted from the unprecedented die-off and prioritizes tree removal in these areas. It also calls for state agencies to take several actions to enable removal of hazard trees. The proclamation also seeks federal action to help mobilize additional resources for the safe removal of dead and dying trees. In addition, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services and CAL FIRE are convening a Task Force on Tree Mortality comprised of state and federal agencies, local governments and utilities that will coordinate emergency protective actions and monitor ongoing conditions.

### **Governor's Drought Task Force Meeting**

As part of the Governor's ongoing drought outreach, the Governor's Drought Task Force is organizing regional/local meetings throughout the state. During the October 22 meeting, the Task Force announced that the next regional Drought Task Force meetings are scheduled for November 12 in San Luis Obispo and in Sacramento/Yolo County on November 17.

### **Californians Meet Governor's Water Conservation Mandate for Fourth Consecutive Month**

Californians reduced water use by more than 26 percent during September, exceeding Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.'s 25 percent conservation mandate for a fourth straight month. Nearly all water suppliers in the state have complied with the conservation standards. However, four urban water suppliers that have consistently failed to meet their water conservation goals. The suppliers are the city of Beverly Hills, city of Indio, city of Redlands and the Coachella Valley Water District.

## COUNTY DROUGHT TASK FORCE KEY ACTION ITEMS FROM LAST MONTH

### **County Office of Emergency Services:**

San Luis Obispo County OES continues to coordinate with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to provide updates on the drought situation, respond to specific information requests to Cal OES, and coordinate local emergency needs.

### **Emergency Actions:**

No new emergency actions have been taken specific to the drought in this reporting period.

### **County Facilities Usage & Conservation Actions:**

The county has taken the following actions:

- Water Conservation: Water usage data for all facilities with water billing from a vendor has been entered into the Utility Manager system. Water usage status updates for the users in the Utility Manager system and the County Operations Center show a 31% reduction countywide in water usage in September 2015 from September 2013.
- Fixture Replacement: To date, staff has retrofitted 44 buildings with low-flow fixtures, saving an estimated 4,500 gallons per week.
- Leak Repair: Staff continues to identify and repair leaks to minimize water loss.
- County Standards for Construction Contracts: Staff is reviewing and updating County standards for plumbing fixtures, to include more specific language for lower water usage fixtures in facility construction contracts and purchase orders.
- County Airport: As previously reported, County Airport fire hydrants must be flushed periodically to maintain safe water for drinking due to chlorine levels. The Airport is making the water from hydrant flushing available for agricultural operations, construction, or other purposes. Please contact the Airport at (805) 781-5205 if interested in using this free water.

### **Drought Contingency Planning:**

The Public Health Department, the Public Works Department, and CAL FIRE/County Fire continue to develop plans to ensure there is adequate supply of water for firefighting and domestic water use in the event that a community does not have enough water. Water availability information from small and large

## Attachment 1

public water systems has been categorized into three categories; Watch, Vulnerable, and Critical. The information has been placed into a GIS mapping layer for contingency planning.

### **County Public Outreach Actions:**

Information regarding current and upcoming drought relief programs for rural homeowners has been placed on the County Drought Conditions and Water Conservation webpage. Rural Development, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), delivers a number of programs to help improve the quality of life in rural communities throughout the nation. These programs may also help rural communities, businesses and individuals impacted by California's ongoing drought conditions. For additional resources and information on applying for any of these programs, please visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ca> or the County Drought Conditions and Water Conservation webpage at [http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought\\_Update.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought_Update.htm).

In an effort to raise awareness about water supply issues the County continues to examine multiple channels of communication for water conservation outreach efforts. Check out our water-saving tips, shareable water saving images, and customized Tweets and Facebook posts just for you to share and help us continue the SLO County culture of conservation at the following link: [http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought\\_Update/water-conservation.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought_Update/water-conservation.htm)

To report drought-related concerns or for water conservations questions, call the County Water Conservation and Drought Hotline at (805) 781-4466.

### **DROUGHT RELATED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION**

#### **County of San Luis Obispo Drought Conditions and Water Conservation**

([http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought\\_Update.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought_Update.htm))

#### **State's Water Conservation Campaign; Save our Water**

([www.saveourh2o.org](http://www.saveourh2o.org))

#### **California's Drought Information Clearinghouse; Drought.CA.Gov**

(<http://ca.gov/drought/>)

#### **California Department of Food and Agriculture; Drought information**

([www.cdffa.ca.gov/drought/](http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/drought/))

#### **California Department of Water Resources; Current Water Conditions**

([www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/drought/](http://www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/drought/))

#### **California State Water Resources Control Board; Water Rights, Drought Info and Actions**

([www.swrcb.ca.gov/waterrights/water\\_issues/programs/drought/index.shtml](http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/drought/index.shtml))

#### **California Department of Public Health; Drinking Water CDPH Drinking Water Program**

([www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/pages/dwp.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/pages/dwp.aspx))

#### **USDA Disaster and Drought Assistance Information; USDA Programs**

([http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=DISASTER\\_ASSISTANCE](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=DISASTER_ASSISTANCE))

#### **UC Cooperative Extension Drought Information Resources; Drought Information Resources**

([http://cesanluisobispo.ucanr.edu/Drought\\_Information/](http://cesanluisobispo.ucanr.edu/Drought_Information/))

